

Residents unite as Blue Zones supporters

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The residents of Tidewater by Del Webb in Estero may not be old friends going back years but they share a commonality of coming together for causes.

The community with 100 homes completed so far gained Blue Zones Project recognition in March to be proactive about healthy living. They acted on it recently in May when they were asked to conduct a food drive to benefit the Harry Chapin Food Bank of Southwest Florida.

"Our residents came out in droves and brought bags and bags of food," Michelle Kithcart, lifestyle director at Tidewater, said. "We filled the back of the van."

The community engages in Blue Zones Project supported activities often, which are framed in the Power 9 principles of lifestyle traits and habits that promote longevity, she said.

The food drive was held May 4 at Tidewater, and a lot of people dropped off food donations in the days before and after, she said. They donated 380 pounds of food, which is equivalent to 317 estimated meals.

"Our residents are very generous about giving back to the community," Kithcart said.

Tidewater was approached about the food drive from a local Blue Zones engagement coordinator, Marcy Ricciardi, who works with homeowners' associations.

The idea was to pilot a food drive by one Blue Zones community before expanding it to other communities, Ricciardi said.

The Blue Zones Project is a local initiative to improve the health of Southwest Florida residents by enlisting businesses, employers, restaurants and other entities to include healthier options in daily practices. The goal is that people will select the healthier option and it becomes routine.

The Blue Zones project was introduced to the region in 2015 by the NCH Healthcare System and is based on the world travels of Dan Buettner, who identified communities worldwide where people share lifestyle traits and live to 100 or older. He wrote a New York Times bestseller about the nine principles of longevity.

The "Power Nine" include moving naturally by being physically active, knowing your purpose in life, taking time to relax, having a healthy social network and putting loved ones first.

Harry Chapin serves more than half 150 agencies in Charlotte, Collier, Glades, Hendry and Lee counties to provide food to their needy clients.



BLUE ZONES PROJECT STAFF

Marcy Ricciardi, left, and Jessica Ayers Crane from Blue Zones Project; Michelle Kithcart, lifestyle director at Tidewater by Del Webb; Meg Madzar of Harry Chapin.